

Great expectations in hard times

Citizen service beyond today

THE
PERSPECTIVE
SERIES

New insights into the UK workplace



Foreword



Jeroen Hoencamp,
Enterprise Director, Vodafone UK

Being a better 'service' organisation is our goal. It's what keeps us up at night. So just simply listening to what customers really want and expect from their service experiences has been crucial in so many ways. It's reinforced the importance of delivering on our service promises. And the need to consistently strive for continuous improvement. There's always ways to do things just that bit better. We hope you find this insight as useful as we have in reaching your goals too.

Not everyone knows that Vodafone has a long history of helping the public sector to improve the service it provides to citizens – either by making people and information more accessible, or through the multi-media contact centres we provide.

Lately there's a recurring theme that crops up in all those customer conversations. You're consistently telling us that you're working with significantly restricted budgets. Yet you also say that the pressure on you to improve the overall 'citizen' experience has never been greater – particularly from the citizens themselves.

That's not an ideal situation.

With that in mind, this report brings together the best and brightest minds in customer service and most importantly the citizen voice to respond to your challenges. Specifically, it takes a close look at the things you need to consider to ensure that your future investments in customer service are really targeted, focused and successful.

I'd like to say a big thank you to Public Services Network programme director Jon Williams, social media expert Linda Cheung and Circle Research for their independent insight and guidance.

And of course also to our contributors from Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Bromley Healthcare and Hampshire Constabulary – all of whom granted us in-depth interviews that add greatly to the wealth of insight within this report. I hope you enjoy the results and find the report useful, practical and actionable.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeroen Hoencamp'.

More from the Perspective series

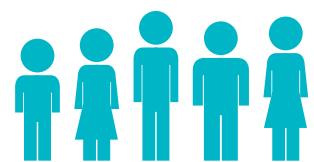
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 Length
27
Pages

 Read time
2
Cups of tea

 People
800
Surveyed

The people behind it



Linda Cheung, CEO, CubeSocial

Linda Cheung is CEO of CubeSocial, a social CRM start-up, and a recognised thought leader on the topic of social media for business. A former Executive Director at Morgan Stanley, Linda's 13-year career in highly regulated markets give her a unique drive for tangible results, whilst avoiding the hype often associated with social media.



Andrew Dalglish, Director, Circle Research

Andrew has specialised in B2B research for over a decade and co-founded Circle Research in 2006. He is a columnist for B2B Marketing Magazine, a frequent speaker at leading events such as the Social Media World Forum and teaches the MRS B2B research course. Andrew holds an Honours degree in Psychology from Aberdeen University, an MSc in Marketing from Strathclyde University and an MRS diploma.



Jon Williams, Public Services Network Programme Director, Cabinet Office

Jon Williams is the Public Services Network (PSN) Programme Director. PSN is a core component in the Government's ICT Strategy. His current role covers the leadership and strategic direction of the programme, market positioning, commercial strategy and alignment with the other areas of the ICT Strategy.



Cleaven Faulkner, Chief Inspector, Hampshire Constabulary

Chief Inspector Cleaven Faulkner has served with Hampshire Constabulary for 20 years as an operational officer and is currently on secondment as a Superintendent to the United Kingdom Border Agency, working on their new mobility Program. Previously Cleaven has been responsible for major projects to improve use of airwave radio and mobile data in policing, laying the grounding for new and innovative ways of working with modern technology.



Liz Holt, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Director of Community Health Services

Liz has over 18 years experience at director level leading, managing and developing community health services. She is a former Director of Community Health Services for NHS Blackpool and previously Director of Clinical Support services for a community trust in East Lancashire.



Jonathan Lewis, CEO, Bromley Healthcare

Jonathan has worked in a number of industries – advertising, television, social investment and most latterly health, as well as running his own consultancy business and sitting on a number of public, private and charity boards. His principal interest is in making socially driven organisations more effective – driving quality and productivity so they offer better services to those they serve, as well as being able to compete with powerful private sector organisations.



Sue Morris, Head of Enterprise Customer Service, Vodafone UK

Sue Morris is Head of Enterprise Customer Service at Vodafone UK and is known for building a strong and positive business culture around the needs of the customer. She has held numerous other customer-focused positions in the telecoms industry including Head of Consumer Customer Service, Head of Small and Medium Business and Head of Telesales and Outbound Retention.

Introduction

Everyone's fed up of hearing it...

Economic growth remains a real challenge. UK GDP shrunk by 6.4% between 2008 and 2009. Only half of that decline has since been recovered and the latest output figures – a 0.3% fall in GDP between October and December 2012 – have brought on fears of a third recession.

Overall the economy is now 3.3% smaller than at its peak in Q1 2008. And Local Authorities in particular are feeling the pinch. At the end of 2012 the Government announced that funding for the average council will be 1.7% lower in 2013-14, while some of the wealthiest councils face average funding cuts of 8.7%. The Institute for Fiscal Studies also reports, the other primary source of funding, Central Government grants, has fallen by 13.3% in real terms.

In short, austerity is the new reality. Yet at the same time, expectations from citizens – increasingly connected and empowered – are rising all the time.

Which way forward?

Of all the ideas that have been put forward to meet this dual challenge, the Public Services Network (PSN) is one of the most innovative and far-reaching. The PSN will develop a single, logical network, based on industry standards, that will encourage efficiencies, flexible working and collaboration across multiple departments.

But while a lot of the talk about PSN has been focused on rationalisation, it would be a mistake to think that this initiative is all about cost cutting, or just about technology. On the contrary: PSN is just as much about creating new joined-up public services for the benefit of citizens. In the words of PSN Programme Director Jon Williams, one of the key contributors to this report, "PSN is a fantastic enabler. It really opens the way for much more flexibility in the way we deliver services to citizens and businesses in the future, wherever they are in the UK and worldwide."

However this report also raises a number of important questions that, so far, haven't really been explored in any depth: That is;

- what do citizens really expect in terms of 'service' from public sector providers?
- how are their expectations changing in the light of new trends and technologies?
- how are those expectations likely to change in future and what's the impact?

This report examines these questions in detail. At the core of the report is an exclusive survey, which canvassed the opinion of 800 citizens representative of the UK population. This part of the research focuses on how those citizens want to deal with their local council and the experience they expect from contact centres.

In a complementary stream of research the views of leaders from across the public sector have been canvassed. This covers the end-to-end service that the public sector provides beyond the contact centre. Specifically, it reviews the various ways in which those organisations are looking to improve service delivery, while also improving the overall citizen experience.

To give the debate added perspective the following experts share their thoughts:

- **Sue Morris**, Head of Enterprise Customer Relations for Vodafone UK, discusses how a focus on deep customer insight will make sure you get the long-term balance of your contact centre operations right
- **Linda Cheung**, CEO at CubeSocial, gives her view on how public sector organisations can start introducing social media to deliver better service
- Meanwhile **Jon Williams**, Programme Director for PSN, tells us how the government's vision for creating a more joined up public sector has the potential to improve overall service delivery in exciting new ways.

Finally, the report pulls together this insight and advice into five key tips that you can take away and consider for your organisation.

"PSN is a fantastic enabler. It really opens the way for much more flexibility in the way we deliver services to citizens and businesses in the future."

Jon Williams,
Public Services Network
Programme Director, Cabinet Office

Executive insights

CITIZENS AGED 18 – 24 THAT WANT TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA MORE FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE



17%
want to use Facebook more



10%
want to use Twitter more

CITIZENS THAT WANT TO ENGAGE THROUGH A CHANNEL OTHER THAN TELEPHONE OR EMAIL TODAY



9%
want to engage through a channel other than telephone or email

The blueprint

The starting point for the research is a blueprint for great customer service. This is based on basic standards and expectations that are unlikely to change over time.

To achieve this, respondents also said that customer service needs to be carried out by staff with the expertise, understanding and authority to resolve the issue satisfactorily. Ultimately this means you need to take full and un-qualified ownership of the issue, and avoiding passing the citizen from pillar to post.

The challenge

While those standards and expectations of customer service are not likely to alter over the next 10 years – the way that people want to interact with your customer service operations will. For the time being telephone and email are still the preferred ways to get in touch with a local authority's customer service team. A key point to note though, the survey also reveals that younger citizens aged 18 – 24 said that they want to use social media more often for customer service.

- 17% want to use Facebook more
- 10% want to use Twitter more

Even now a considerable minority of citizens – 9% – wants to engage through a channel other than telephone or email. This means that if truly excellent customer service is your goal, then an integrated, multi-channel approach is a must.

In terms of overall service delivery beyond the contact centre, public sector providers agree on one main challenge: customer service and overall service delivery needs to be improved to meet rising expectation from the public, but this somehow needs to be achieved with dwindling budgets.

The way forward

Drawing on the insights and advice provided by expert contributors and the independent researcher team behind this report, they've formulated 5 areas that you can focus on to future proof your approach to customer service.

- stay focused on the basics – make sure that continuing to improve the way you handle 'traditional' elements like calls and emails remains core to your approach
- ask for feedback – think about using new methods and technologies that will help you gather more intelligent feedback from citizens
- improve service on the frontline – work towards streamlining the processes that keep bringing your field personnel back to the office and its likely you'll also improve frontline service
- make the most of PSN – embrace the PSN ethos as an enabler of cultural change, not just a means to reduce costs
- take it one step at a time – make sure that any new approach is realistic, and that customer expectations are set accordingly

A timeless blueprint?

A NOTE ABOUT ONLINE SERVICES

Just to be clear, this report talks principally about public interactions with your customer service teams or field workers. It's not referring to transactional online services, such as those that allow you to pay bills or renew licences. Rather, it discusses customer service interactions and complaints that are more likely to happen when those transactions might have failed or citizens are just seeking help. For more information about online access to public sector services and the governments Digital by Default strategy, try the content on the **Vodafone Guardian Partner Zone**

THE 4 MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THAT MATTER IN A SERVICE EXPERIENCE



56%
the issue being resolved satisfactorily



51%
the service representative understanding the issue



48%
the first person encountered being able to deal with the issue



45%
a quick response

What do citizens really want?

First things first – what makes for great customer service? In a time when multimedia customer service operations are evolving rapidly, it's important to hold on to a 'blueprint' for customer service that reminds us what success really feels like for the citizen, regardless of the latest media trend or technology.

This is crucial. It means that whenever trying something new, there will always be a checklist of considerations before deciding if a new approach is really worthwhile. For this reason, you can make sure you never move too far from the timeless fundamentals that resonate most with citizens.

To get to the blueprint, respondents were asked a set of carefully considered questions.

Make it quick, easy and effective

Ask a typical citizen to rank the things that matter most to them in a service experience and one thing dominates - the issue being resolved satisfactorily. 56% place this in their top five.

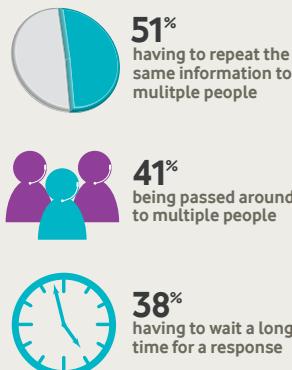
In reaching this resolution, three further attributes are also seen as important:

- the person they deal with understands the issue (51%)
- the first person they encounter can deal with the issue (48%)
- they get a quick response (45%)

This is reinforced when asked to name the biggest irritations they experience in a service experience. Three emerge time and again: having to repeat the same information to lots of people (51% name this as a frustration), 41% say being passed around and 38% say having to wait a long time for a response.

This should remind us of an important fact. People really don't want to contact your service department – they usually only do so when there's a problem that needs to be solved. A good experience is one which resolves the issue quickly and with the minimum effort for the citizen. This should be our focus above all.

THE BIGGEST IRRITATIONS IN A SERVICE EXPERIENCE



WHY DO CITIZENS GET IN TOUCH WITH THEIR LOCAL COUNCIL?

Nearly half (49%) of citizens have contacted their local council in the past year. The five most common reasons for doing so (apart from housing) all relate to the environment:

- 31% made contact in relation to refuse collection
- 24% in relation to recycling and waste
- 18% in relation to roads and pathways
- 14% in relation to noise and pest control
- 10% in relation to the general appearance of the local area

The typical council responds pretty well to these types of enquiry. The average score given to a council's customer service is 7 out of 10. That's pretty good. But how do you move to great?

Accept responsibility and take ownership

Look a bit deeper still and it emerges that excellent service goes one step further.

Not only were citizens asked what mattered to them, they were asked to rate the quality of their last customer service experience. When we isolate people who were delighted with the experience and look at their satisfaction with different elements of it, something interesting emerges. These delighted individuals are more likely than average to rate six specific elements of the experience especially positively. This correlation suggests that these elements have an important role in creating that delighted state.

Four are practical in nature and support what we've already seen:

- the speed of response to the enquiry
- the level of expertise demonstrated
- the issue being resolved satisfactorily
- and any promises made being delivered

The remaining two elements are somewhat 'softer':

- delighted citizens feel the person handling their enquiry cared
- delighted citizens also feel the person handling their enquiry accepted responsibility

Notably, a satisfactory resolution of the issue emerges as the most powerful driver of delight.

The blueprint

Put this together and here's the blueprint for customer service success in the public sector.

- above all, service needs to satisfactorily resolve the issue
- in doing so it needs to be highly responsive and minimise the effort the citizen needs to put in
- good customer service needs to be delivered by staff with the expertise, understanding and authority to resolve the issue satisfactorily
- and it needs to take full, un-qualified ownership of the issue: avoiding passing citizens from pillar to post

Ground rules for the future

However, citizens choose to contact you – by phone, email, online or through social media, this blueprint should hold true. After all, when it's boiled down, it's just a human interaction. But does this mean that these fundamentals will also hold true in the future? Very likely. The precise definition of each element will change over time. For example, increasing use of social media means that what's seen as 'responsive' now is unlikely to be considered 'responsive' in 10 years' time. But on the whole, this **essence of good service is timeless**. As such, it needs to run strongly through any future vision of customer service success.

ACCORDING TO UKCSI THE TOP TEN PERFORMING BRANDS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE ARE:

- ASOS 91.6
- Amazon 90.6
- First Direct 89.0
- John Lewis 88.5
- Volvo 88.2
- **The Ambulance Service 87.7**
- **The Fire Service 87.3**
- Waitrose 87.0
- Hertz 86.5
- Skoda 86.5

Lessons from our private peers

Every year, the Institute of Customer Service surveys UK consumers to produce the UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI). Retailers come out very well: ASOS, Amazon and John Lewis all made the top four in 2012 alongside online bank First Direct.

These companies are obviously in very different situations to the public sector. But is there anything the public sector can learn from their success? A quick analysis of two of the main contenders – First Direct and John Lewis – shows they both employ practices that closely match our blueprint for successful customer service.

First Direct, for example, is known for **not using recorded phone messages**. This means its customers get to speak to a knowledgeable and friendly person who strives to see things from their view. First Direct staff are also encouraged to enter into a genuine conversation and **take responsibility for fixing issues** to the customer's satisfaction.

John Lewis stands out because its staff famously **go the 'extra mile'** for the customer. Staff are also able to bypass rules to put things right for the customer. As a company, John Lewis has also put big investment in multi-channel integration across its stores, the internet and mobile shopping channels.

Ambulance and fire services – Hard won results in service delivery

Hot on the heels of some of the world's top retailers, the UK's ambulance and fire services are also rated highly in the latest the UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI). They come in at sixth and seventh respectively.

You could argue that's not much of a surprise. These standards of responsive and efficient service are something of a necessity in the emergency services. But we should also recognise that the results achieved are hard won. And they're often the result of careful and intelligent investments in new resources – particularly new technology.

South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) is a case in point. After it was created in 2006 following the merger of four ambulance trusts, SCAS recently replaced all its legacy IT and telecoms systems with a single streamlined system. Using Unified Communications, they further improved communications between SCAS's highly skilled teams of call handlers and dispatchers, paramedics and first responders. In a time of restricted budgets, it's also significant that Unifying SCAS communications will deliver savings estimated at £500,000 over the next five years, all of which can be recycled into improving frontline patient care.

Future channels and challenges

TODAY'S VIEW: CITIZENS PREFERRED ROUTES TO ACCESS CUSTOMER SERVICE



63%

prefer to access customer service by telephone



29%

prefer to access customer service by email

Coping with what comes next

So service is high on everyone's agenda – or at least it should be. The blueprint gives you a good idea of what citizens really want out of the service experience. But what about all those new channels everyone keeps talking about? How are your service operations going to cope?

Let's start with the basics. Customer service is useless if no-one can access it. Seems obvious, but many organisations fall at this very first hurdle. 43% of citizens surveyed said they find it hard to access service from public sector organisations in the ways they want.

The natural inclination is for citizens to want to pick up the phone (63%) or send an email (29%) to access their local council's customer service. For now, these routes should still be a core focus.

The slow rise of social media

But, hold on. Isn't social media revolutionising the world of customer service?

Not quite yet. People might well follow public sector organisations to get updates on what's going on, such as local events. But as yet, very few use it to engage with the customer service team. Currently 1% regularly uses Facebook to access their council's customer service and just 2% use Twitter. This is set to change, social media use is growing exponentially in other areas, 16% of the UK population are active users of Twitter.

The slow uptake according to respondents is because local councils simply aren't set up to work in this way. 34% of citizens asked, feel their local council is unable to hold conversations using Facebook and 35% say the same of Twitter. Let's not be too hasty though. Before you rip up that social media strategy, consider two things:

- the way the future generations are likely to want to interact with you
- the way new channels like social media – if they are handled poorly – can have a wider impact on your organisation's reputation

Remember, the younger generation has grown up with technology with the older generations adopting these trends too. It's no surprise that consumer behaviour and expectation is changing as a result.

**TODAY'S VIEW:
CITIZENS AGED 18 – 24
THAT STILL PREFER TO USE
TRADITIONAL CHANNELS**



51%
prefer to use the telephone



32%
prefer to use email

**CITIZENS AGED 18 – 24 THAT
WANT TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA
MORE FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE**



17%
want to use Facebook more



10%
want to use Twitter more

Getting your strategy right for the future

Whilst the revolution hasn't happened yet, you need to recognise that preferences are changing. Take the 18 – 24 age group for instance, they may not yet be clamouring to access customer service through social media today (51% prefer telephone and 32% email), but they are more prone to doing so than any others – 6% frequently do so via Facebook and 7% via Twitter. Importantly, a sizable minority want to use social media more often – 17% want to use Facebook and 10% Twitter.

This trend is set to continue. For example, Twitter says it now has more than 10 million active users in the UK – that's equivalent to 16% of the entire population. So, if councils want to encourage engagement amongst younger citizens, social media should be on the agenda. But even if not, social media still shouldn't be ignored.

Also the viral nature of social media means that even though only a small minority use it to communicate, they have a disproportionate impact in doing so. Unlike a phone call which is largely private in nature, that Tweet or Facebook update is seen by the citizen's immediate community with the potential to be spread far wider within a matter of minutes. It's supercharged word-of-mouth. Fail to respond or respond poorly and the reputational damage can be significant. But respond well, and goodwill can spread far beyond the person raising the issue.

Here's another sobering fact. Over one in ten (11%) experiencing poor customer service spread negative word-of-mouth using social media. Better revisit that social media strategy.

Enabling a multi-channel experience

Another important lesson emerges when looking closer at how citizens prefer to access their local council's customer service.

As seen, telephone and email are still most peoples' first port of call today. Naturally then they should be a focus. However, even if it's only a minority, not everyone prefers to use these channels.

Add it together and nearly **one in ten citizens (9%) want to engage through a channel other than telephone or email**. This means that if truly excellent customer service is a council's goal, then an integrated, multi-channel approach is a must. An approach which allows citizens to choose when and how they talk to you, and makes sure it's easy for them to move from one channel to the other.

THE 4 S'S

As well as police forces and healthcare providers, councils are putting a lot of work into improving the service they deliver to citizens on the frontline. But where would the citizens themselves like the focus of that activity to be?

Citizens were asked how, if they were in charge, they would spend their local Council's tax income. To do so, they had 100 'points' to allocate across nineteen different services – the more points a service receives, the more tax income it gets.

The most popular services receive 40 out of the 100 points between them. It seems that citizens want the majority of their tax pounds spent on the Four S's:

- **safety** – local policing tops the list and receives an average of 8.5 points
- **support** – care for the elderly/disabled receives 8.2
- **streets** – maintenance of roads/pathways receives 8 and refuse collection 7.3
- **schools** – local schools receive 7.9

"We've now got a much better management information framework that enables us to analyse call trends and undertake forecasting, so we can ensure we have the right resource in the right place, and that urgent calls are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

David Saunders,
Head of Customer Service,
Plymouth City Council

What next for your customer service?

This report has established the blueprint for success. It sets-out that a multi-channel approach that embraces social media – even though this is still an emerging trend, is a key part of future proofing your strategy.

Next, this report looks at the bigger picture and the best ways that you can take your service improvements beyond the contact centre and onto the 'front' line.

Plymouth City Council – getting the basics right

Other channels are on the rise – albeit slowly – but phone calls are still hugely important in the public sector. So what do you do when you find your capacity and ability to deal with those calls is not up to scratch?

This was the situation Plymouth City Council found itself in when it discovered that its 70-agent contact centre wasn't up to dealing with a predicted growth in call numbers. Its system was also unreliable, creating a risk that the public would be unable to contact important departments such as social services workers or calls would be lost.

These problems have been solved thanks to an advanced call management solution that enables real-time reporting and performance statistics.

"We've now got a much better management information framework that enables us to analyse call trends and undertake forecasting, so we can ensure we have the right resource in the right place, and that urgent calls are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week," says David Saunders, Head of Customer Service at Plymouth City Council. "Previously, we didn't have the intelligence to look at resourcing on an hour by hour basis, so we could have agents sitting there not being utilised fully. We can also do skills-based routing and put overflows in place so that all the operators can take the right kind of calls based on their training."

Importantly, the new system is also opening up the possibility of reducing costs. For example, the Council is undertaking a property rationalisation programme and the new system is helping. "We needed a telephony solution that's free from constraints. With the Vodafone system we can move somewhere else if needed – in fact we expect to move as we increase call volumes," says Saunders.

In the future, the flexibility of the solution will also allow the council to provide call centre capabilities to local partners under a shared services model – bringing the potential to generate extra income that could be reinvested in improving services for citizens.

The bigger picture



Cleaven Faulkner, Chief Inspector, Hampshire Constabulary

FROM RIOT CONTROL TO DAY-TO-DAY ENGAGEMENT – A CHANGING ROLE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA?

The use of social media may still be in its infancy in the public sector but as in the previous chapter mentions, organisations are going to need to start taking it seriously if they want to engage with all generations in the future.

Tim Godwin, who was acting commissioner of the Metropolitan Police during the 2011 riots, believes police forces could in fact do a lot more to promote more effective engagement on day-to-day issues. Godwin cites forces in the US, including both the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, who have **dedicated social media monitoring** facilities available around the clock, but who are also making efforts to meet an expectation among LA citizens that they can use social media networks to interact with the police.

Mr Godwin believes there is a similar expectation with members of the public in the UK. According to a survey by Accenture on social media use by law enforcement, **90 per cent of UK respondents** say they **want to be better informed** and provide more help to their local force.

Boosting service delivery beyond the contact centre

Improving customer service in the public sector is not only about improving the way your customer service department operates. Importantly, it's also about how you deliver services in the community, in homes and on the streets.

We examine how different types of organisations are attempting to boost service delivery beyond the contact centre. Through a series of in depth interviews, we asked the leaders of those organisations to describe how their approach is changing in the light of budget reforms. Surprisingly, they reveal that these changes will actually benefit citizens, improving their overall experience.

One of the most common themes we came across in our interviews is the extent to which new approaches to efficiency, though borne out of a need to keep costs down, are also uncovering real improvements in the way services are delivered to the public. Cleaven Faulkner, a Chief Inspector for Hampshire, describes the situation from his perspective.

"We're being asked to do more with less, that's effectively what's happening," he says. For Hampshire, like many police forces across the country, much of the solution lies in technology.

"We're using modern technology to review the process of how policing has manifested itself over the years into the modern era," he says. "We believe that technology can help us provide that higher level of efficiency and effectiveness. But more importantly, it can enhance the service that we provide to the public".

"Trying to maintain service with reduced numbers of officers is a bit of a challenge, but it's one that we're rising to. We're able to demonstrate **crime in Hampshire is falling**, so we are obviously doing the right things in the right areas. Technology is an enabler to allow that to occur."

Apps on the beat

How, exactly? Faulkner gives an example of an old process that involved officers collecting witness statements at an incident, then making a phone call to back office to input that data. By introducing an innovative app on mobile data terminals, officers can now key data straight into the force's system – eliminating double keying, and ending the need for surplus back office functions. The efficiency and data quality benefits are clear. But according to Faulkner, there are also huge benefits in terms of service.

"The quality of service that we provide to the victim or the witness is actually better as result of this new process," he says. "At the end of the statement, the witness is able to sign on screen there and then and the statement is sent in electronically. The witness sees we are acting quickly, accurately and that we are taking them seriously. There's no room for doubt, and the public have confidence and reassurance in the way we are interacting with them."

"When we develop new processes like this, it's always in the back of my mind that statistically, most members of the public only have one encounter with the police service. If that encounter is a good encounter, then that's a real positive image for the police service."



Liz Holt, Director of Community Health Services, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Better service at the point of care

Financial cuts in health services have not been as drastic as elsewhere in the public sector, but healthcare providers are still feeling real pressure. They're not taking it lying down though, Liz Holt, Director of Community Health Services for Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, talked to us about how the search for greater efficiency is also helping the Trust to meet rising patient expectations of service.

"Over the past five years the biggest changes that I've experienced are around the funding of services," they're not taking it lying down though, Liz Holt. "We've now got to try to provide the same with less money. We need to be more productive, and that's a big challenge."

"The other big challenge is public expectation of our services. This has changed quite considerably over the past five to ten years. Patients are expecting more responsive services, just as we all do with any service we access. I expect to be able to access my bank any time during the evening. Or if I want to buy anything, I expect to be able to speak to somebody. In the NHS it's now similar. Patients do expect to be able to access services. So we are looking at evenings, weekends and just making services more accessible for people."

"We also have to recognise that patients are also better informed than they were. Many patients have access to the internet. Most people now have a mobile phone or smartphone. We all expect to be able to get information we need at the touch of a button. This does put more pressure on our service. In short, we need to make sure that we're able to respond quicker and with better information than we had previously." One of the ways Blackpool is responding is by using mobile technology to drastically reduce the paper-based administration that community-based nurses have to do. This reduces the time they have to send travelling backwards and forwards to offices, giving them more time to care for patients in their homes.

Reducing paper-based administration

Significantly, Holt says that the technology they are using – deployed on tablet – is also improving the quality of service the nurses are able to provide when they interacting with the patients at the point of care.

"Our district nurses have been equipped with tablet devices that are always connected to our back office records," she says. "From the patient's point of view the member of staff turns up to their house, they have all the clinical records they need there with them. It makes a big impression. And if the patient needs something ordering then they can do it there while they are with them. The patient knows that it's been done, we don't have to get back to them to just confirm, and we are usually able to say when the equipment or whatever it happens to be is going to be delivered." Whilst these benefits are being realised today, Holt says this is just the start of a **brighter future for the overall patient experience**.

"We're in the very early stages, but so far even though we can really see what benefits this kind of approach to improving front line service is going to bring," she says. "Planning ahead, we're also gathering information whilst we're seeing patient's, using an app on the mobile devices to gather that information and measuring it against patient care indicators."

"We all expect to be able to get the information we need at the touch of the button. This does put more pressure on our service. In short, we need to make sure that we are able to respond more quickly and with better information than we had previously."

Liz Holt,
Director of Community Health Services,
Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



Jonathan Lewis,
CEO Bromley Healthcare

Managing a cultural shift towards quality

Like Blackpool and a lot of other NHS organisations, Bromley Healthcare uses mobile technology to enable its staff to spend less time doing admin and much more time looking after patients. In particular Bromley is making great use of telecare – the remote monitoring of patients in their home. “We have patients who tell us that the telecare we provide has saved their lives on several occasions,” says Jonathan Lewis, the CEO for Bromley Healthcare.

But what does this really mean for the patient

Lewis also believes there are a range of other new ways that Bromley can improve service for patients that go beyond technology. This, he says, is being enabled and driven by Bromley’s status as a social enterprise.

“Becoming a social enterprise has put us into a competitive environment for the first time,” says Lewis. This, adds Lewis, has put an enormous focus on improving the quality of services that Bromley provides. “First and foremost we’re always trying to improve services to create better patient outcomes, but we also have this new reality that if we don’t offer the best services we will simply go out of business.”

Evolving the organisation

Lewis believes that Bromley is able to meet this challenge because – as a social enterprise – it is able to think and work differently.

“There are various structural processes we can put in place to deliver higher quality patient care, but the most fundamental driver of that is a new culture,” says Lewis. “So we work a lot on giving everyone sensible targets and then holding them to account for it,” he adds. “The NHS has been poor at holding people to account for poor performance. This is one of the main cultural journeys we’ve had to go through: to show our people that targets are targets and that we’re extremely serious about hitting them.”

Results suggest that the approach is paying real dividends, with measurable improvements results and service.

“In the last 18 months, we have run a leg ulcer pilot that has reduced healing rates from 21 weeks to 5 and increased our productivity by 15%, to cite just one example,” says Lewis.

Significantly, Lewis says that the approach is also achieving very high levels of satisfaction from both patients and staff.

*“We’re a brand new organisation with new ideas, but it’s a measure of how our staff are engaged that less than 2% think we will fail,” he says
“More importantly we’ve taken over services and taken their performance from bottom to top quartile in a matter of months. Our new approach, driven by a new service culture, is definitely working. In fact the scope to improve what we do is really only limited by what we can imagine and implement.”*

Jonathan Lewis,
CEO Bromley Healthcare



The word is mightier than the pen

Doncaster and Bassetlaw NHS case study

Many of the public sector leaders we interview talk about the importance of gathering feedback on the public's experience of their service. This is one of the best ways any organisation can analyse what it's doing well, and where service can be improved. But in the public sector in particular, many of the systems for collecting feedback are outdated, cumbersome and time-consuming for staff.

Doncaster and Bassetlaw NHS has responded to this issue by replacing a manual system based on Excel spreadsheets with a digital pen that captures what has been written or drawn on regular paper and transmits this data back to a PC or server. The solution now means a patient, carer or member of staff can fill in a patient experience form using the digital pen, then dock the pen at a laptop or PC on the ward. At 1am every morning the information is combined from all surveys and a single consolidated file is sent to the Trust's Quality Team for analysis and reporting.

The results have been dramatic. For an initial investment of just £65,000, the solution has revolutionised the patient feedback process, saving up to 30 staff hours a week – around 1,500 hours a year.

Patient experience has significantly improved in 45 of the 55 areas surveyed, accurate patient data can be available within 15 seconds and rekeying of data has been completely eliminated. Critically, as a result of these improvements the Trust has secured Commissioning for Quality and Innovation (CQUIN) funding valued at £913,000.

"We are constantly striving to do better – in terms of patient feedback, patient experience and patient care," explains Heather Keane, Assistant Director for Quality at Doncaster & Bassetlaw, who receives a daily patient feedback update.

"Our previous manual system was flawed, as it was very time-consuming and the information was often out of date by the time we received it – leading to delays in improvements to patient care."

"The new system means quick and easy recording of feedback with no disruption to patients and huge time and cost savings for staff."

Your next move

How is your service stacking up in the face of budget reforms?

- is there room for improvement in the experience you deliver to citizens from the contact centre to the front line?
- do you have a blueprint for customer satisfaction that will stand up in a brave new world of social media and multi-channel integration?
- could you partner with other organisations or find other innovative ways to share resources and deliver services more flexibly?

In the final section of the report, expert contributors comment on how all this can be achieved.

"We are constantly striving to do better – in terms of patient feedback, patient experience and patient care. The new system means quick and easy recording of feedback with no disruption to patients and huge time and cost savings for staff"

Heather Keane,
Assistant Director for Quality,
Doncaster & Bassetlaw

ARE WE KEEPING CITIZENS SATISFIED?

THE FUTURE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

THE UKCSI TOP TEN
PERFORMING BRANDS INCLUDE¹

THE AMBULANCE SERVICE

 87.7

THE FIRE SERVICE

 87.3

90% OF CITIZENS
WANT TO BE
BETTER INFORMED
ABOUT POLICING

55% OF ALL CALLS TO
LOCAL COUNCILS ARE
ABOUT REFUSE
OR RECYCLING

51% SAY THE
MOST
IRRITATING
THING IS HAVING TO
REPEAT INFORMATION
TO DIFFERENT
PEOPLE

29% OF CITIZENS
PREFER TO ACCESS
CUSTOMER SERVICE
BY EMAIL

56% OF CITIZENS
THINK RESOLVING THE
ISSUE QUICKLY
IS MOST IMPORTANT

KNOW HOW
CITIZENS
WANT TO
CONTACT YOU
IN THE FUTURE

MORE THAN 17% 
of 18-24 year olds want to use
Facebook more for customer services

MORE THAN 10% 
of 18-24 year olds want to use
Twitter more for customer services

THE
4'S'S

The top things citizens would choose to
spend their taxes on

SCHOOLS
& EDUCATION

SAFETY
& POLICING

STREETS
& MAINTENANCE OF ROADS

SUPPORT
CARE FOR THE ELDERLY AND DISABLED

5 GOLDEN
RULES

DON'T NEGLECT
THE BASICS

Focus on continually improving
the way you handle 'traditional'
channels like phone and emails.

FOCUS ON
FEEDBACK

Look out for new ways to find
out what your customers think.

SIMPLIFY
PROCESS

Budgets are tight, so consider stream-
lining processes and reducing admin.

USE THE PUBLIC
SERVICES
NETWORK

Consider how the PSN could help you
share resources and infrastructure.

ONE STEP
AT A TIME

Be realistic, and manage customer
expectations accordingly.

The customer service perspective



Sue Morris, Head of Enterprise Customer Relations, Vodafone UK

New era, new demands

When I first read this report, I couldn't help but agree with the premise that the fundamentals behind great customer service are the same today as they were 20 years ago. I also believe they will be the same in another 20 years.

But if there's one thing that certainly has changed over the last few years it's how much busier people are. Everyone is constantly switched on. People also have less time, which means they demand more of your service department when they need to get in touch, and we need to find better ways to respond to this.

What does this mean for the customer service industry today? What are the biggest priorities? In my opinion it's three things:

- in such a fast paced environment, speed and efficiency are prerequisites
- public sector or private, we all have to deliver results regardless of channel (in person, on the phone or online)
- on every occasion we want our customers – or citizens in your case – to come away saying "that was easy, it worked, and I'm impressed"

How to get the balance right?

Naturally the customer service industry is responding with new skills and approaches that meet changing customer behaviour. At Vodafone we're responding by investing in multi-channel integration to try and make sure the experience for our customers is seamless, regardless of when or how they choose to talk to us. I also recognise that we can learn a thing or two from this customer insight to help influence and improve the way we do things.

You could argue that the public sector should think no differently. Let's face it, everyone expects organisations to be available and ready to serve us today – whether it's your local bank or your local council.

Budgets are a problem of course. But don't forget that advanced contact centre technology is now included in the Public Service Network (PSN procurement framework). This means that advanced technology suddenly becomes a lot more affordable. Making key investments in this area will give you the scope to build in new capabilities like social media management tools. As this report notes correctly, this will be important if you are considering how to future proof your customer service strategy for the next 10 years.

But in my opinion this will only take us so far.

"Using this technology, we are spending an enormous amount of time listening to our customers and finding out what drives their satisfaction at every single stage of their journey with us."

Sue Morris, Head of Enterprise Customer Relations, Vodafone UK

The most important thing is to keep listening

Spending lots of time listening to customers and finding out what drives their satisfaction at every single stage of their journey, is one of the most important things we can do to get the balance right. Real time feedback systems provide fresh insight from customers – making sure every improvement made is driven by them.

Customers give their feedback via a mobile survey at the point of experience. The result is that we have customer insight and information to build on, that is far in advance of anything that we had before.

It's interesting to see that the public sector leaders interviewed for this report also really see the potential for this kind of immediacy and live engagement. [Hampshire's police force](#) is already looking to add a satisfaction survey onto its new system for collecting and approving witness statements 'live' at the scene. [Blackpool NHS](#) is talking about using a tablet that district nurses can use to collect patient feedback, right there in the patients home. And [Doncaster and Bassetlaw](#) shows just what can be achieved when advanced digital feedback mechanisms are in full flow.

Investment will continue in areas like multi-channel, self-service and social. They're all a very important aspect of the future operation and are only likely to grow. But gaining new insight into what customers really want is paramount and has become the bedrock of plans for moving forward. It allows us to know what we are doing right, for every type of interaction and how this maps against an overall blueprint for success.

What could it do for you? In the most basic terms possible, this kind of practice will mean you are able to resolve complaints and enquiries more satisfactorily. It will allow you to reduce the amount of effort the public have to make when they contact you. Most significantly, it will tell you about the moments when you can really make the big impression – the kind that makes the citizen go 'Wow!'.

And that, regardless of the channel or technology that you are talking to citizens through, is always going to be of enormous value.

"Gaining new insight into what our customers really want is paramount and has become the bedrock of our plans for moving forward. It allows us to know what we are doing right for every type of interaction and how this maps against our overall blueprint for success."

Sue Morris, Head of Enterprise Customer Relations, Vodafone UK

The social perspective



Linda Cheung,
CEO, CubeSocial

SOCIAL MEDIA IS 24/7, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE

If you don't believe this is true, take a moment to research some examples from the private. In the US, for example, one of the most famous exponents of corporate social media – the Bank of America – makes it clear to its customers that its social media customer service is only open 8 – 8 Monday to Friday. HSBC similarly doesn't provide 24/7 service, and there are plenty of other examples in other industries.

The case for social evolution

Contributing to this report, I'm mindful that the customer service support centre I provide for my own business is built entirely around social media, email and online self-help information.

Before you ask why this is relevant to the public sector – bear with me for a moment. You see, I got to thinking why exactly this approach has been a success. Our customers are happy with the service we provide. And I can think of only two occasions when people have commented about our lack of phone numbers – both of whom have been converted into customers.

And then I got to thinking what this might be able to teach any kind of organisation, large or small.

Looking at the blueprint for successful customer service in this report, you can start to see a pattern emerge.

Our customer service satisfactorily resolves the issue

We are held accountable by our customer community on Twitter, which means we can't leave issues lying unresolved. This makes us much more responsive than if we were chasing voicemails that no one else knows about.

We minimise the effort the customer needs to put in

Our self help option, which enables customers to find answers easily, is great at minimising effort and allows the customer to get answers whenever is convenient for them.

We avoiding passing people from pillar to post

For us, this is the beauty of Twitter based support. The customer feels as they though they are talking to one voice, and the flow is uninterrupted.

Admittedly this will be different for public sector organisations that need to take issues 'offline', perhaps for data security reasons. But in many instances where there isn't such a need for privacy – for rubbish or recycling collections for example – it could work perfectly.

"I believe social media has the potential to bring new efficiencies to wider customer service operations: taking the pressure off phone lines, critical services and improving engagement on dwindling resources."

Linda Cheung,
CEO, CubeSocial

GET TO KNOW YOUR CITIZENS BETTER THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be a brilliant medium for catching citizen feedback and opinion, especially on a limited budget. In times when cuts are deep, this could be a real area of potential for the public sector to explore. Try this for an approach:

- think about the words and phrases people might use if they were complaining about the service you provide (write them down).
- you could also think of what people might say if they were dissatisfied with other closely related public services. Note those phrases down too.
- create a new Twitter recording using the phrases you came up with...this way you can start recording all the conversations that match.
- once or twice a day you can then check-in on your recording and scan through the results looking for people who are complaining about service failures that are highly relevant to you.

Use this approach and it soon becomes easier to see where you can improve. And most importantly, you'll identify the moments of interaction that are most likely to really impress citizens when you get it right.

"If you are thinking of making your first move, the most sensible thing to do is evolve your presence step by step. Get involved in conversations. Build your social profile as a service organisation."

Linda Cheung,
CEO, CubeSocial

Consider social media as part of the plan

- **Social media can help you do more with less:** one of the biggest themes throughout this report is the fact that public sector organisations of all types are being asked to perform more effectively with fewer resources. I believe social media has the potential to bring new efficiencies to wider customer service operations: taking the pressure off phone lines, critical services and improving engagement on dwindling resources.
- **It's ok to set expectations:** one of the things that puts organisations off doing customer service via social media is the idea that they're going to need to be available every hour of every day. The fear is that this will cripple their resources and that their slow responses may even do more harm than good. I believe this is a misconception. Social media is 24/7, that doesn't mean you have to be. If you're a public sector organisation especially, people will know and understand that. So set expectations. Tell people when you're open to talk. People in the social world really are okay with that.
- **You only need to take one step at a time:** remember that social media in customer service is an evolution. You don't have to go all out straight away. So think about what you can manage, build incrementally, and make sure you keep people up to date on how you're progressing. But most importantly, get started!

Of course I'm not suggesting that everyone should use social media in isolation for customer service as we've done. We are a small company, so I'm fully aware that the scale and challenges are different to those faced by public sector organisations. Also we are a social media company, so you can argue that our social approach to service does fit with our brand. But what I am saying is that social media could, and should, work as a viable part of any service operation.

The government perspective



Jon Williams, Public Services Network Programme Director, Cabinet Office

Reading this report, I feel that the message is clear. People want to connect with you in fluid and flexible ways. When they do get through, they want issues solved satisfactorily. Specifically they want service that is seamless. They want things to be joined up. And they don't want to be passed from pillar to post.

Seems like quite a task.

I'm here to tell you the good news is that the Public Sector Network (PSN) can give you access to the right technology (or infrastructure) to help you achieve all this and more.

How?

- by making enabling technology services more affordable (including advanced call centres that enable multimedia contact)
- by enabling you to share and create services with other authorities and providers more easily

Let's start at the beginning. The PSN is actually a relatively simple concept. PSN is one logical network, based on industry standards, that is in effect a more open and competitive ICT marketplace at the heart of the UK public sector. It has been put in place to substantially reduce the cost of communication services across UK (there are actually two frameworks: one for network connectivity and pipes, the other for services that would run on top, such as multi-media contact centre services that are central to the discussion in this report).

But PSN is not just about the money. And it's definitely not just about the telecommunications network industry.

Above all, PSN is about enabling much more fluid and flexible ways of delivering business in the public sector in the future. We are making it much easier for different departments and authorities to work together. We're reducing barriers related to technology. In doing so, we're generating a platform for public sector business leaders to think in a different way about how they want their business run, and how can they innovate.

PSN is mandated for central government. For non-central government it isn't. What's very interesting is that in many ways it's the non-central government organisations that are leading the way. They're thinking about how they can leverage PSN to join up organisations in their area and think differently about how they deliver better services for citizens and businesses in their particular area.

I see that kind of thinking reflected well in this report, particularly from innovative new organisations like Bromley Healthcare, and it augers well for the future.

"People want to connect with you in fluid and flexible ways. When they do get through, they want issues solved satisfactorily. Specifically they want service that is seamless."

Jon Williams,
Public Services Network
Programme Director, Cabinet Office

One thing I noted in the Bromley interview in particular is the way it is reaching out to other organisations to form partnerships – not just with hospitals and GPs, but also charities. This is the essence of PSN. It's a fantastic enabler for that kind of thing. In fact, when creating the PSN market place, we have ensured that those frameworks that we have put in place can be used not just by public sector bodies but also organisations on their behalf. That means PSN can also involve and embrace broader set of organisations who provide services to the public, including the third sector.

"In 5 year's time it would just be wonderful if we don't even mention the words PSN... I would love it if we only talk about fantastic service delivery in the public sector."

Today we don't talk about the internet, and we don't talk about our bandwidth to the internet. What we talk about in terms of the internet is Facebook, Twitter or the services that run across it – iPlayer would be another example. In 5 years time, I would love it if we only talk about fantastic service delivery in the public sector.

To help us get there, my message to public sector leaders is not to think about PSN as technical IT delivery. I would really encourage them to think about the exploitation, the coming together of organisations and the sharing of data and services. And ultimately, how that could support them, their endeavours and their vision for delivering better service to citizens.

Final thought and practical tips

As the blueprint shows, it's simple enough to agree on what makes for a satisfying citizen service experience. Yet most have differing views on how customer service can improve to meet those expectations in a rapidly changing world. This report has explored a wide variety of suggestions from a number of interested parties: everyone from the citizens themselves to customer service professionals, the government and social media experts. Here are 5 key ideas derived from the report that will provide you with food for thought – and may just provide you with new focus for moving forward:

1. Stay focused on the basics

A lot of the talk today is about 'connected' citizens. In the future, public sector organisations are likely to respond with more and more emphasis on social and digital channels. As research shows, however, the vast majority of people still want to communicate by phone, email or in person. So make sure citizens are always able to contact you on their terms. For most organisations this will mean keeping these core elements – calls and emails – as the bedrock of a progressive multi-channel strategy.

2. It seems obvious, but ask your customer's for feedback

Above all citizens want their issues resolved satisfactorily. Organisations that do this well understand their citizens inside out: they solve problems successfully because they know what people want and need at every single stage of their interaction with them. To help you achieve this goal, it's well worth considering investing more of your time gathering detailed citizen feedback. Mobile technology can help provide the solution in the form of digital pens or apps on smartphones. Social media can also help you make better use of budgets, by providing a new mechanism for gathering feedback and intelligence.

3. Simplify processes, improve customer service onto the frontline

Budget cuts are forcing many organisations to streamline their processes and reduce admin. For many though, this is also proving to be an opportunity to improve the service delivered to the public on the frontline. Using mobile technology to eliminate paper based processes is definitely more efficient, for example. But this can also help you improve citizen perceptions of live interactions with your personnel in the field. Service becomes quicker, more responsive and more accurate.

4. Make the most of the Public Services Network

PSN is currently only mandated for central government and is discretionary for local government. Yet many believe the regional level could be the real driving force that makes PSN a success. There are already examples of police forces, councils and healthcare providers talking about sharing resources and infrastructure – not just to reduce property costs, but to improve the way services are co-ordinated and delivered.

5. Take it one step at a time, and set those expectations

Whether you are thinking about adding new channels like social media right now, or simply have them on the to-do list, the key thing to remember is to take it one step at a time. The social media world in particular is very accepting of experimentation. Make a small start, gather feedback along the way and refine your efforts as you move forward. And remember, just like your phone lines or offices, social media doesn't necessarily have to be 24/7. It's ok to set expectations. Some of the biggest companies in the world confine their social media customer service to office opening hours. It's ok for you to do so too.

About the Vodafone Perspective series

The Perspective series is designed to help businesses and public sector organisations find better ways of working. Researched independently, the series explore the biggest business challenges facing business today and provides new perspectives from independent thought leaders.

There are currently three other reports in the Perspective series:

- Exploring the shift in employee expectations
- What if?...Exploring attitudes to risk
- Have a nice day! Customer service beyond today

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Methodology

The survey results in this report are based on 800 online interviews with individuals representative of the UK population. Interviews were designed, conducted and analysed by Circle Research in October 2012.

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